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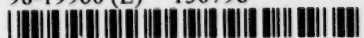
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Agenda item 14 (a)

Social and human rights questions: advancement of women

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.





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SOCIAL QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONS RELATING TO HUMAN RIGHTS

(a) Status of Women

WRITTEN STATEMENT PRESENTED BY THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) welcomes the concern of the United Nations to strengthen its interaction with civil society. It points out that, at the level of the State, Parliament is the institution through which the concerns and aspirations of civil society are relayed. It is through Parliaments that the hopes of society are expressed in all their diversity and where they are channelled and transformed into the collective will. Parliaments are also, both as an institution and through the individual action of their members, the channel through which the norms and recommendations adopted by Governments in the United Nations are relayed to the people.

The social dynamics mirrored in Parliaments are today deeply marked by the change in the traditional balance of the division of labour between men and women. To varying degrees and in different ways, this transformation is taking place throughout the world, regardless of the level of economic or cultural development. This process is the fruit of the on-going profound transformations in economy, information technology and spiritual values but it is also the outcome of decades of work by the United Nations and a multitude of other organisations, including the IPU, to put an end to the whole range of discriminatory practices which affect women and which have resulted in serious imbalances in all walks of life.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union does not study the question of the status of women separately but from the perspective of the development of partnership between men and women. As a political organisation, it gives special attention to women's participation in political life. Its action aims to strengthen the foundations of democracy and is inspired by the following principle set out in the *Universal Declaration on Democracy* (1997)¹: « *The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences* ».

Meeting in Windhoek in April 1998 at the invitation of the Parliament of Namibia, the Inter-Parliamentary Council (the plenary governing body of the IPU²) undertook to study the means to support United Nations action concerning women. In the spirit of the Agreement of Co-operation signed between the IPU and the UN in 1996, it took the following measures aimed at strengthening

¹ The Declaration appears in « *Democracy - Its Principles and Achievement* », Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1998.

² The Council is composed of two representatives from each of the 137 Parliaments members of the Union

the synergy between the two Organisations in order to give effect to the « *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* » and « *The Beijing Platform for Action* » and at encouraging Parliaments to exert greater influence for the national implementation of these texts.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The Inter-Parliamentary Council noted that the ratification of treaties implies a number of obligations for States parties, in particular, that of harmonising national law with the treaty provisions and reporting periodically to a competent body on national measures to follow up those provisions. With regard to CEDAW, the Council noted that Article 18 lays down that States must submit periodic reports on « *the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention and on the progress made in this respect* ».

Of the 161 States parties to CEDAW in April 1998, 56 had never submitted a preliminary report on the follow-up action they had taken, and some 30 States were very late in submitting subsequent periodic reports. Therefore, the Inter-Parliamentary Council called on members of the Parliaments of the States concerned to enquire about the reason for this delay and to encourage their Governments to submit detailed and complete reports as soon as possible that comply with the standards laid down by the CEDAW Committee.

Moreover, considering that the reservations expressed by many States when acceding to CEDAW weaken the scope of the Convention, the Inter-Parliamentary Council called on members of the Parliaments of the States concerned to enquire about the validity of such reservations with a view to their being lifted if possible. It recalled that in 1993 it had stressed that « *Parliaments should be more diligent in ensuring that the Executive submits to the international treaty bodies the requisite reports, including references to the work and observations of MPs. If Parliaments are not consulted when these reports are drawn up, they should receive them for information, together with the opinions, decisions or recommendations of the committees to which they were submitted.* »

Beijing Platform for Action

The IPU considers that the commitments entered into by Governments at Conferences such as the Fourth World Conference on Women are commitments of the State. It points out that the legislative branch of the State, the Parliament, is a key actor whose intervention is required to obtain the enabling legislation and also the budget needed for the implementation of the plans established by administrations to give effect to international agreements.

For this reason, the IPU participated in the preparatory process of the Beijing Conference and encouraged a strong parliamentary contribution to it. It thus made various contributions to the Conference, including the adoption of a « *Plan of Action to correct present imbalances in the participation of men and women in political life* », a document that is related to the part of the Platform for Action concerning decision-making.

Since 1995, the IPU has constantly worked to follow up the Beijing Conference. Noting that national follow-up of its own Plan of Action and of the Beijing Platform for Action will both be assessed in 2000, the Inter-Parliamentary Council has wished to strengthen the synergy between the action of the two Organisations. To that end, it has proposed the following measures:

1. Co-ordination regarding the collection of data on the implementation of the two above-mentioned documents (Beijing Platform for Action and IPU Plan of Action) and regarding the reports on national action which will be submitted in 2000 to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the one hand, and to the Inter-Parliamentary Council on the other;
2. Contribution of the IPU to the preparatory process of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly and participation of a parity delegation of the IPU (two persons) in the Session;
3. Inclusion of MPs in national delegations to the Special Session of the General Assembly;
4. Holding of a UN/IPU joint meeting on the occasion of the Special Session of the General Assembly, on the theme « *Democracy through partnership between men and women in politics* » in which government and parliamentary representatives will participate, together with representatives of the international organisations concerned;
5. Providing the United Nations (which is due to produce statistics and indicators on the situation of women in the world) with statistical and other data concerning women's participation in political life;
6. Co-ordination regarding follow-up to recommendations emerging from the General Assembly and the Inter-Parliamentary Council in 2000.